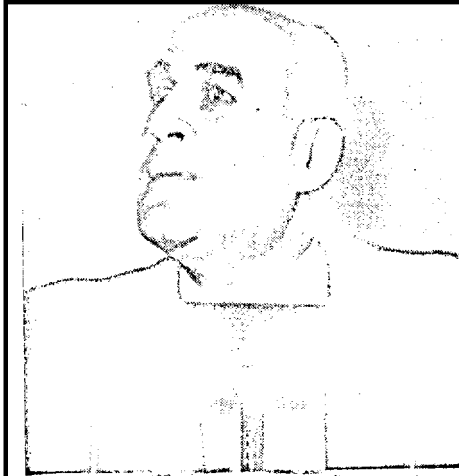


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Mustafa Amin: Spy or scapegoat?

footedly through the upper reaches of Cairo's political world—so sure-footedly that even after Al Akhbar was nationalized he managed to hold onto his job as publisher. But last week, after years of ups and downs under the Nasser government, Mustafa Amin hit his all-time low: he was, in fact, on trial for his life.

Amin, a product of Washington's Georgetown University, had never made any secret of his pro-Western sympathies. But according to the Cairo government, his friendship for the U.S. had gone far beyond acceptable bounds. Last July, as he sat in an Alexandria garden lunching with Bruce Taylor

Odell, a young American diplomat, Amin was arrested. Accused of being a "long-time spy for the Central Intelligence Agency," he was thrown into jail.

It is difficult to say what brought on the accusation. Odell, who claimed diplomatic immunity, was rushed pell-mell back to Washington—which, to the suspicious, suggested that he might, indeed, be a CIA agent. But Amin's friends insisted that he was the victim of a conspiracy by left-wing newsmen who had convinced Nasser that Amin must be chopped down. Others believed that the Nasser regime, worried by an increasingly shaky economy and mounting dissidence, had decided on a series of flamboyant show trials. About the time of Amin's arrest, the Egyptian police had jailed hundreds of Communists, rightists and assorted "political opportunists" who will be coming to trial shortly. Quite possibly, Nasser may have felt that to give the trials a little political balance, he needed a Western sympathizer in the dock, too.

No Objections: When he was led into the Supreme State Security Court on an island in the Nile one morning last week, Amin, 51, was pale from his five months in jail and noticeably thinner than his customary 240 pounds. He smiled uncertainly across the courtroom at his

brother's wife, Khayriah, (Ali himself was not there. Asked to return from London for questioning, he declined—perhaps wisely—on the ground of ill health.) But when the head of the three-man military tribunal, a grim-faced lieutenant-general, asked Amin whether he had any objections to the composition of the court that was to try him, the ex-publisher staunchly replied: "I welcome any court because I am innocent."

A short time later, Amin did plead guilty to two relatively minor charges of illegal currency dealings, but on the major charge of espionage his plea was a ringing "not guilty." In response, prosecutor Sallah Nassar promised to prove Amin's guilt with tape recordings of his conversations with Odell. And after Nassar, resplendent in a tailcoat and tricolor sash of red, green and black, demanded the death penalty, the tribunal moved behind closed doors to hear the evidence and ponder Amin's fate.

The chances that Amin actually would hang did not seem great. But the chances that he would get off scot-free seemed even slighter. For the Egyptian Government itself had authorized Amin to keep in close touch with U.S. diplomats and was obviously aware that in this process he could scarcely avoid contacts with CIA agents. Accordingly, the mere fact that Mustafa Amin was on trial at all made it plain that his masters had decided he would be more useful as a scapegoat than as a pipeline.

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Down and Out

Not too long ago Mustafa Amin was an important man around Cairo. A hard-driving editor who puffed his way through four packs of Pall Malls a day, he had blazed new journalistic trails in Egypt with Al Akhbar, the racy, irreverent daily which he had founded in partnership with his twin brother, Ali. And as an early supporter of the Nasser regime ("the first honest, democracy-loving government in 5,000 years of Egyptian history"), he moved sure-